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ABSTRACT

Despite the fact that teacher evaluation has long been a factor in the areas of promotion and salary increase, the proposed statewide implementation of a teacher assessment plan (the Mississippi Teacher Assessment Instrument) has aroused anxiety in Mississippi's educational environment. It is therefore critical that principals actively promote a collaborative process and collegial relationship between the administration and the teaching staff, encouraging teachers to ask for help in improving performance, and providing a process for obtaining that help. Four specific conditions are necessary for maintaining such collegial relations. First, evaluative instruments must be fair and objective and must be fairly administered. Second, teachers must be able to perceive that the objectives of the evaluation process are aimed at improving the instructional program as well as teacher performance. Third, teachers must believe that identification of weaknesses will lead to help in strengthening those areas where weaknesses exist. Fourth, teachers must be involved in the process. Principals must accept the responsibility of knowing and using well whatever instrument is employed, and school districts must assume responsibility for proper training of administrators. (IW)

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TEACHER EVALUATION: THE ROLE OF THE PRINCIPAL

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Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Mississippi Association of School Administrators (54th, Jackson, MS, October 12-14, 1986).

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TEACHER EVALUATION: THE ROLE OF THE PRINCIPAL

Teacher evaluation has become a critical issue in education. The various news media inform us, on almost a daily basis, of the concerns of teachers and administrators as we prepare for this year's statewide implementation of the teacher assessment plan. As late as this past Sunday, the public was informed by the local newspaper that teacher groups say the plan is confusing, unfair, and too subjective. They voice concern about politics or favoritism creeping into evaluation. And, finally, we are told that teachers have not been given adequate time to prepare for this new plan and that the students will be adversely affected because of the time teachers must devote to planning for their assessments.

Against the backdrop of all of this attention, principals realize that their always visible role will receive even more attention than is usual this year. It is therefore critical that this role be well-played. Sessions such as this are invaluable in providing forums for discussion of the concerns of administrators relative to teacher evaluation. Here we can share ideas and offer suggestions which will help to insure that this will be a well-planned and effectively implemented operation.

First, let us consider the principal's role in setting the climate for evaluation. How do we get teachers to "buy in" to the purposes and processes of evaluation? Individual principals must give much time and thought to this question

and view it within the framework of the characteristics of their own staffs. Consider these questions which have been posed: "Can there be a collaborative process and collegial relationship between the administration and the teaching staff when current conditions cause the process to begin with a summative action?" and "Can the informal collegial consultation be generated and maintained?" In posing an answer to those questions, I would first of all point out that, in spite of the fact that a $1,000 salary increase is at stake in these evaluations, evaluation of teachers is not a new idea in this state and it is assumed that continued employment, surely at least as important an issue, has always been a factor in previous evaluations. We can find in this state, at this time, schools in which teacher evaluations have long been done and where there is evidence of collegiality between principals and teachers. What we also find in these schools is strong leadership and teachers who have accepted the responsibility for what happens there.

Establishing such a relationship does not happen overnight. The principal who devotes effort to establishing a climate in which this relationship can exist finds it much less difficult to encourage teachers to accept performance assessments in which the purpose is to strengthen instruction, not get rid of teachers.

Therefore, my answer to the questions posed would be, "Yes. Such collaborative and collegial relationships can be generated and maintained." But I would also caution that there are very specific conditions under which this may occur.

First, evaluative instruments must be fair and objective and must be administered in that manner. A second condition is that teachers must be able to perceive of the objectives and the process as being aimed at improvement of the instructional program as well as identification of weaknesses in instructional delivery. Further, they must believe that identification of weaknesses will result in help in strengthening those weaknesses. And finally, teachers must be involved in the process. At the very least, this means providing an avenue for input; at most, it will mean some degree of shared decision-making relative to the process.

It is incumbent upon principals to encourage the perception that they are quite capable of objectively assessing teacher performance. Again, the media has focused much attention on this issue. For example, much as been made of the fact that some principals were trained as recently as this past September to use the MTAI. There is a failure to point out, however, that while the instrument is relatively new in this state, teacher performance assessment has long been a part of most principals' responsibilities. Also, while the training may be a one-time occurrence, principals will continue to study <u>this</u> instrument in order to use it most effectively. It is important to principals as well as teachers that this is done. It is probable that there will continue to be objections by some regardless of the instrument or method used, but if principals accept the responsibility of knowing and using well whatever instrument is employed, they will be less vulnerable to charges of subjectivity. School districts

also have a responsibility to provide administrators with the proper training in the utilization, not only of the Mississippi Teacher Assessment Instrument, but of a variety of methods to be used in assessing teacher performance.

Principals must be prepared to offer help to those teachers who show evidence of a less than desirable level of performance. New teachers in particular may feel especially vulnerable because of their lack of experience. As principals, we must not only encourage teachers to ask for help but must provide a process for obtaining that help. One of the purposes of evaluation is to improve performance, and evaluation is less threatening when identification of weaknesses is accompanied by aid in overcoming them. This, too, is a part of the principal's role.

It is more important now than it has ever been that we perform well the task of evaluating teachers. The adversarial relationship which has become a part of the educational environment in Mississippi in recent years has made it even more necessary that administrators show strong and effective leadership in this area. For those teachers who say, "I know I'm a good teacher," evaluation offers the opportunity to have that fact well documented; for those who are less sure, evaluation can offer the opportunity to identify weaknesses and find ways of strengthening those areas. We must all make the effort to make this a shared goal.

As educators, we are all aware of the problems facing education today. We must not allow our fears or concerns to stand in the way of taking those actions which we believe

will ultimately result in acceptable solutions to some of these problems. If solutions are to be found, we can find them. In spite of shortages of teachers in certain areas, the declining pool of young people interested in education as a career, the rise of teacher unions, etc., teacher evaluation will continue to be a necessary component of having effective instructional programs and good schools. There are no infallible formulas but we must remember that our training and experience has prepared us for this role and we can manage it well. Our children will be the beneficiaries of this effort.